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ABSTRACT

Colorado's Educational Accountability Act, enacted in 1971, requires that each of the state's 181 school districts undergo a process of planning and implementing school improvements. This report utilized local districts' findings to answer the following questions: (1) To what extent is the Educational Accountability Act being implemented in Colorado? (2) To what extent has the accountability process led to program improvements and improved pupil performance? and (3) How is Colorado doing in mathematics and reading? Fifty-seven percent of the districts increased their implementation of the accountability program, while only six percent seemed to have lost ground. Seventy-six percent of the districts which were well into accountability reported program improvements in mathematics, reading, language arts, vocational education and career education. Moreover, seventy-five percent of the districts in a sample of Colorado's larger school districts, showed pupil performance in reading and mathematics at, or above, the national norm. (MV)

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ACCOUNTABILITY IN COLORADO

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ACCOUNTABILITY IN COLORADO

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ABSTRACT

Accountability in Colorado has been in operation for five years as a state mandated but locally controlled process of planned school improvement. With the swelling of the back-to-basics tide, two questions have come from the legislature: is accountability leading to school improvement? If schools are improving their planning, what is happening to achievement? Data collected from Colorado school districts are used to show that in Colorado planning has led to achieving priority goals and program improvements. Districts that focus on planning for achievement goals report favorable results in pupil progress. Accountability is working in Colorado.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Enacted by the Colorado General Assembly in 1971, the Educational Accountability Act requires that each of the 181 school districts undergo a process of planning and implementing school improvements. The Act sets up a state committee to advise the State Board of Education on ways to help implement the Act. Each district is required to set up a broad-based local advisory committee, report to the community, and report annually to the state board. The local committee is to advise the local board of education on educational needs and priorities as seen by all parties, and to provide school-community input into seeing that programs to meet these priorities are planned, implemented, evaluated and reported to the various publics.

This report answers the following questions:

1. *To what extent is the Educational Accountability Act being implemented in Colorado? Are we making progress?*

2. *To what extent has the accountability process led to program improvements and improved pupil performance?*

3. *How is Colorado doing in pupil performance in mathematics and reading?*

The implementation of educational accountability in Colorado focuses on local control of education. Needs and priorities are best identified at the local level. Once needs and priorities are identified, then if planning occurs and action plans are developed and carried out, generally the objectives will be achieved. The Colorado Department of Education assists local districts in developing and carrying out their school improvement programs. The Department also monitors compliance in meeting both accountability requirements and accreditation criteria. The information submitted by districts provides the basis for this report.

PROGRESS IN ACCOUNTABILITY

To what extent is the Educational Accountability Act being implemented in Colorado? Are we making progress?

All 181 Colorado school districts submitted their annual accountability reports for 1975-76 to the State Board of Education. Two districts did not have functioning committees and reported essentially a blank progress report.

Committee Membership

Local educational accountability advisory committees are appointed by and are advisory to the local boards of education. District accountability committees, in 1975-76, ranged in size from 4 to 58 members, with the average committee size being 14 members as indicated in Table 1. More than 2500 Colorado citizens were involved in the district accountability committees.

Table 1

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP IN LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEES

Member Category	Average Number on Committee	Number of Committees with No Representatives
Parents	5.3	3
Taxpayers	1.9	34
Students	2.3	8
Teachers	2.5	2
Administrators	1.7	5
Others	0.6	125
Total	14.5	

Parents, taxpayers, teachers and administrators are required to be on local accountability committees. As Table 1 shows, many committees have trouble identifying persons to serve in the taxpayer category (citizens who do not have children in public school). Other than the taxpayer category, only three districts did not report members in all required categories: Elbert, Otis, and Rifle.

Building Committees

Effective development of improvement plans calls for planning at the building level, where the students and teachers are. Districts are encouraged to develop building level planning groups (accountability committees. school improvement councils or parent advisory committees). Some districts, e.g., Mapleton, have had building committees for several years. Of the 106 Colorado school districts with two or more buildings, 56 districts (53%) report they have some planning committee activity at the building level.

District Accountability Status

Eight steps in the planning/accountability process identified for study were:

(1) Goal Development
(2) Needs Assessment
(3) Development of Student Objectives
(4) Development of Staff Objectives
(5) Designation of priorities or target areas for improvement
(6) Program development & implementation
(7) Program evaluation
(8) Comparing cost and relative value of programs

Each district reported on how it was doing in the development of each step in the process. Table 2 shows the percent of districts reporting they were well beyond the beginning stages in developing each step in accountability. The district chart in the appendix shows the response for each district. In general, the districts report they are moving well, but continue to need further development in both the evaluation and cost analysis steps.

Table 2

PERCENT OF DISTRICTS REPORTING THEY ARE WELL BEYOND THE BEGINNING STAGES IN DEVELOPING STEPS IN ACCOUNTABILITY

STEP IN PROCESS	PERCENT OF DISTRICTS
Goal development	87%
Needs assessment	85
Developing student objectives	73
Developing staff objectives	66
Setting priorities	78
Program development	77
Program evaluation	62
Cost/value reporting	54

Four steps critical to progress in the planning/accountability process were identified and used in categorizing the progress of each district. These four steps were:

(1) priority setting
(2) program development and implementation
(3) program evaluation
(4) use of the planning/accountability process at the building level

Two additional steps given some weight were the development of staff objectives and the reporting or dissemination of accountability information.

Using these criteria areas and the information provided in the Annual Accountability Report and other data from the districts, each district was categorized into one of four progress groups:

Group 4 - Well advanced into the development of the process and its use;
Group 3 - Satisfactory growth, development is well-defined and the district is beginning to use the process;
Group 2 - Beginning, still developing the process, some limited use;
Group 1 - No progress or little progress.

Table 3 shows the number of districts in each category and the number of students served by these districts.

Table 3

SCHOOL DISTRICT PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING ACCOUNTABILITY
1975-1976

Extent of Progress	Number of Districts		Student Membership	
Well into process	72	40%	397,818	70%
Satisfactory growth	75	41%	98,980	17%
Beginning development	23	13%	66,570	12%
No progress	11	6%	5,483	1%
	181		568,851	

District Accountability Progress

A comparison was made of the progress of districts in implementing accountability in 1975-76 with their status in the 1974-75 report. Of the 181 districts, 103 (57%) showed a growth in their rating while only 11 (6%) seemed to have lost ground.

The State Board of Education has adopted nine priorities for improving education. If accountability in Colorado is working, then not only should districts set priorities for school improvement, but actual improvements should have occurred. Furthermore, there should be some relationship between district priorities and state priorities. As Table 4 shows, about three-fourths of the districts reported priorities and about half reported priorities in the three leading areas of state concern (basic skills, school climate and utilization of resources). In addition, about half reported specific school improvements related to the planning process. Those districts farther along in the accountability process were more likely to report priorities and improvements.

Table 4 shows a definite relationship between progress in accountability and identification of basic skills as an improvement priority. Thus while two-thirds (67%) of high progress districts have identified basic skills as a priority, less than one-tenth (9%) of low progress districts reported basic skill priorities. A similar relationship holds for priorities in school climate (including discipline) and utilization of resources (including facilities and energy). Districts showing the least progress in accountability could cite few improvement priorities and focused on buildings more than basic skills.

Table 4

SCHOOL DISTRICT REPORTS ON PRIORITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS
BY DEGREE OF PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING ACCOUNTABILITY

Extent of Progress in Implementing Accountability	No. of Districts	Percent Reporting Improvement Priorities	Percent Reporting Priorities For Improvement in: Basic Skills	School Climate	Utilization of Resources	Percent Reporting School Improvements Related to Planning & Accountability
Well into process	72	85%	67%	65%	57%	76%
Satisfactory growth	75	76%	57%	52%	43%	44%
Beginning development	23	56%	52%	26%	26%	26%
No progress	11	36%	9%	18%	36%	18%
TOTAL	181	75%	57%	52%	46%	53%

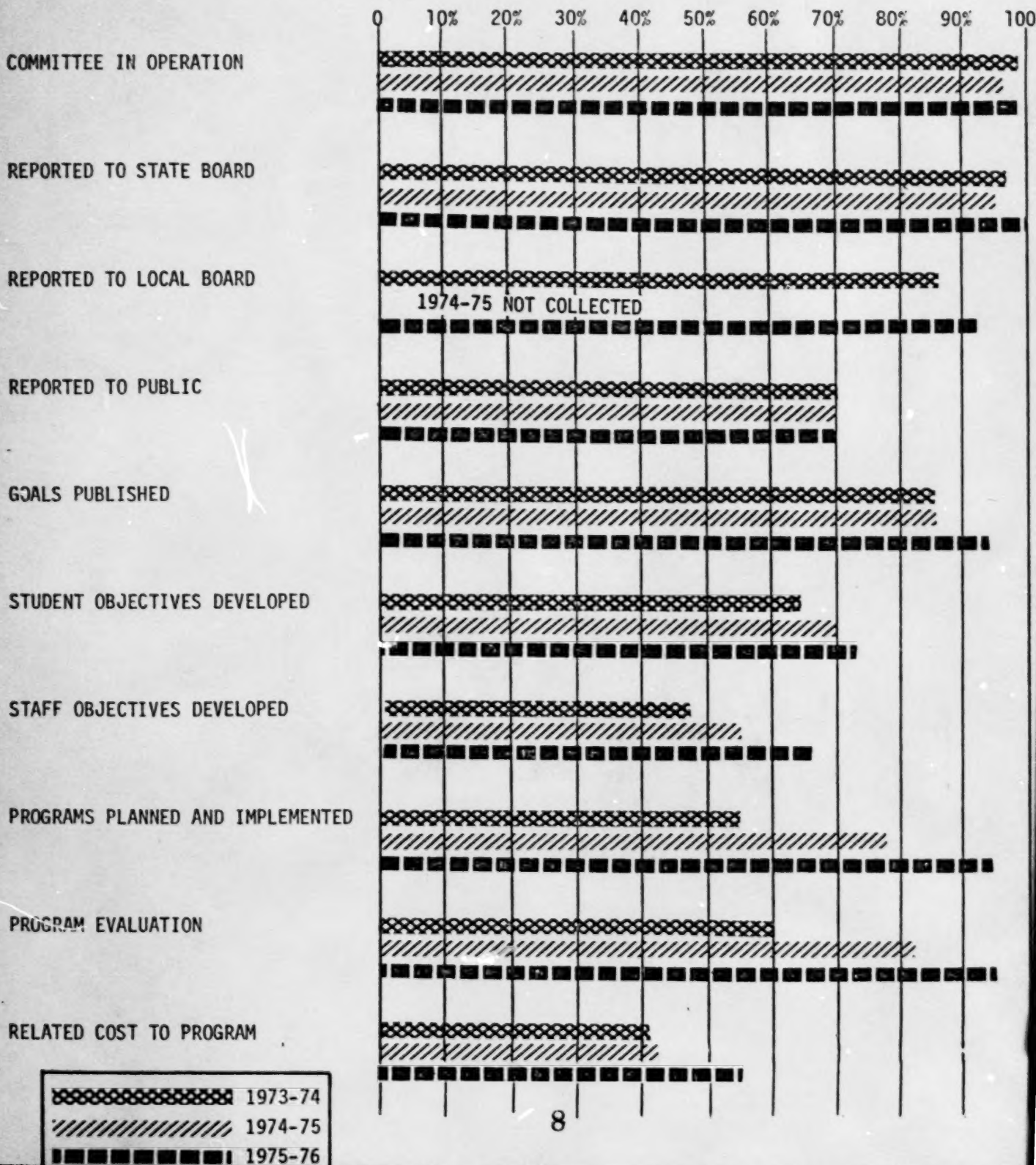
Figure 1 presents a comparison of accountability progress over the past three years (1973-74 through 1975-76). There has been definite growth in the number of districts reporting progress. Reporting effectively to the public continues to be seen as an area of need.

There has been growth in the development of objectives - both student (learner) objectives and staff (process) objectives. Most districts have made many refinements in their objectives since the Accountability Act was passed. Most districts reported they have planned and implemented some programs based on the planning process in accountability (up from 55% in 1973-74 to 94% in 1975-76).

Program evaluation is at least underway in 95% of the districts (up from 60% in 1973-74). However, effective evaluation and a manageable evaluation plan continues to be a problem for nearly all districts. Cost reporting, while showing some growth, remains incomplete.

FIGURE 1

COMPARISON OF PERCENT OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS REPORTING ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRESS 1973-74 TO 1975-76



PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS

To what extent has the accountability process led to program improvements and improved pupil performance?

Some trends are appearing among the districts from the development and use of the systematic planning process (accountability). Those districts that are the most advanced in the planning process:

* are more able to report required information.
* had more frequently set the Basic Skills and School Climate as a priority.
* more frequently reported program improvements.
* more frequently reported strengths and improvement in mathematics, reading, and language arts.
* more frequently reported the development and use of the planning process as a priority.
* more frequently reported improvement in their ability to use the planning process for program improvement.

Those districts that are the least advanced in the planning process:

* had difficulty reporting required information.
* did not indicate Basic Skills or School Climate as a priority.
* did report limited activity in curriculum planning.
* did not report in the area of program improvement.

Program Improvements

More than half of the school districts cited specific program improvements related to their planning/accountability program for 1975-76 (See Table 4). There was a definite relationahip between progress in accountability and reporting program improvements related to planning. Thus while only 18% of districts showing little progress in accountability could cite program improvements, 76% of the districts well into accountability reported program improvements. Program improvements were reported in mathematics, reading, language arts, vocational education, and career education. The districts also reported improvements in their use of the planning process and their ability to evaluate programs and identify needs.

One of the keys to planned school improvement is to set priorities on which needs in a districts are to be worked on first. As Table 4 shows there is a relationship between progress in accountability and the setting of priorities. The focus given by priority setting seems to encourage actual program improvements. Three-fourths of the districts reported they had improvement priorities. More than half of the 181 districts (57%) identified basic skills as a priority area, with those districts more advanced in accountability being more likely to have basic skills improvement as a priority. A similar relationship holds for the identification of school climate improvement (including discipline) and utilization of resources (including facilities and energy) as priorities. These three priority areas are among the nine priorities for 1976-78 set for the Colorado Department of Education by the State Board of Education.

Of the 72 districts showing evidence of a well-defined and operating planning process, 48 (67%) identified basic skills as a major priority. The 11 districts showing no progress in accountability reported few improvement priorities, and focused more on facilities than on basic skills. These districts are high priority districts for assistance by the Accreditation and Accountability Services Unit.

Pupil Performance

Each school district was asked to provide information regarding pupil performance. The information was combined with additional student achievement data reported each spring in accordance with the Consolidated Report provisions (CRS 22-2-112 (1)(k)). It should be emphasized that each school district determines its own testing program, based on those purposes useful to the district. Some districts test extensively and some only briefly. Some districts use their own criterion based assessment, others use standardized tests with national norms, and most use various combinations. Since each district has its own goals and objectives, different tests are selected, and in some cases frequently changed as needs change. Test scores are reported in various ways. All of this makes it difficult to draw conclusions across all Colorado school districts.

Nevertheless, the following data summary was made. Data for the years 1970-71 through 1975-76 were coded into age-grade groups, combining grades, 2-4, 5-7, 8-10, and 11-12. This provides four age groups (labeled grades 3, 6, 9, and 12) across six years. Separate records were kept for mathematics achievement and reading achievement. Within each subject and grade group an analysis was made for each district of the test scores across the years. As of this report a sample of 65 districts (36%) have been analyzed and are included. These districts include 79% of the students in Colorado. Where there was sufficient data to analyze, two codes were given. Norm level was coded as above national norms (national averages), below norm or about even with national norms. Direction, across the last six years, was coded as rising scores, declining scores, or mixed or fluctuating scores with no clear trend. More weight was given to results from the more recent years.

The results were further reduced into those shown in Table 5. The percent of districts with essentially favorable test scores reported are shown by grade and subject. Well over half of Colorado school districts (73%) report their median achievement test scores as at or above average or rising. Better results are reported in the elementary grades than in the secondary grades. Reading and mathematics scores are about the same.

TABLE 5

PERCENT OF DISTRICTS WITH MEDIAN TEST SCORES: (a) AT OR ABOVE NATIONAL NORMS (AND WITH STABLE OR MIXED SCORES OVER TIME), OR (b) WITH RISING TEST SCORES

Grade	Math	Reading	Combined Average
3	82%	88%	85%
6	73	75	74
9	64	63	63
12	63	75	69
Average	71%	75%	73%

Table 6 presents a slightly different analysis, categorizing each district by its progress in accountability. Overall, 63% of the districts well into accountability report rising median test scores or stable scores at or above national norms. However, only 34% of the districts showing no progress in accountability report such favorable test results.

TABLE 6

PERCENT OF DISTRICTS CATEGORIZED BY ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRESS WITH MEDIAN TEST SCORES IN MATHEMATICS AND READING COMBINED EITHER RISING OR STABLE AT OR ABOVE NATIONAL NORMS

	Progress in Accountability Category			
Grade	Well Into	Satisfactory	Beginning	No Progress
3	66	66	56	67
6	69	40	40	22
9	52	36	33	14
12	70	65	17	29
Average	64	52	38	34

Numerous case illustrations of pupil performance improvement related to planning and priority setting were reported by the districts. Three examples are reported as follows:

CASE 1

Denver Public Schools started in 1971 with a special priority on improving reading skills in the primary grades. District-wide test scores for the first grade showed a marked improvement from the 46th percentile in 1972 to the 72nd percentile in 1975. Third grade data shows that 75% of Denver students scored at or above average in 1972-73 (the level expected by national norms). By 1975-76 some 83% of the third graders were scoring at or above national averages.

CASE 2

Jefferson County School District has stressed pupil growth in basic skills. They report the following improvements in test scores as a result of their planned school improvements.

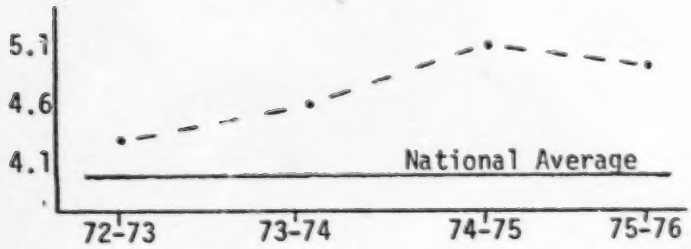
JEFFERSON COUNTY - PERCENT ABOVE NATIONAL NORMS

Grade	Reading Comprehension 1971-72	1975-76	Mathematics Computation 1971-72	1975-76
6	65%	75%	43%	66%
8	60%	73%	46%	69%

CASE 3

The Boulder Valley Board of Education has identified reading as a priority. A variety of reading programs have been implemented. Achievement scores have risen and remained high

BOULDER - GRADE 4 READING IN GRADE EQUIVALENTS



PUPIL PERFORMANCE IN COLORADO

How is Colorado doing in pupil performance in mathematics and reading?

The analysis of median test scores as reported by the districts, described in the previous section, provides some answers to the question of how is Colorado doing in pupil performance. The qualifiers reported earlier should be kept in mind. The data reported here represents a sample of Colorado school districts (65 districts, including all larger districts). Each district selects its own test and grades tested to meet its own needs. Some districts do not test in certain of the grade groups used in the analysis. Small districts may show considerable variation in test score results within a grade when one or two families move.

In general, Colorado districts report mostly favorable test score results in recent years. Basic skills achievement remains mostly stable or rising and is generally at or above national norms.

Level of Scores

Table 7 shows the comparative level of median test scores reported by the districts. About 75% of the reports from districts show pupil performance at or above the national norm. Median scores in the elementary grades generally are higher, compared to national averages, than median scores in the secondary grades.

TABLE 7

PERCENT OF DISTRICT REPORTS SHOWING MEDIAN ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORES ABOVE OR BELOW NATIONAL AVERAGE

Subject and Grade		Norm Level of Scores Above Norm	Even	Below Norm
Math	3	44%	42%	14%
Math	6	26	48	26
Math	9	27	35	38
Math	12	33	40	27
Math Average		32	42	26
Reading	3	63%	23%	14%
Reading	6	38	41	21
Reading	9	31	32	37
Reading	12	22	47	31
Reading Average		41	34	25
Math and Reading Combined		37%	38%	25%

Direction of Scores

The majority of reports (86%) from Colorado school districts show rising test scores or stable or mixed scores over the past five years (Table 8). Only 14% of the reports show declining test scores. Nearly a third of the reports (32%) show rising scores, in contrast to the impression given by many newspaper accounts. Reading and mathematics scores are essentially similar. The national discussion over declining test scores must be tempered by two findings. The National Assessment of Educational Progress finds gains in many areas of achievement, particularly in basic reading skills and among students from those groups that traditionally have scored poorly. Also, in Colorado, many of those districts that have set a priority to improve pupil achievement in basic skills do, in fact, report improved test scores.

TABLE 8.

PERCENT OF DISTRICT REPORTS SHOWING MEDIAN ACHIEVEMENT TEST SCORES 1971-1976 AS RISING OR DECLINING

Subject and Grade	Direction of Scores: Rising	Stable or Mixed	Declining
Math 3	25%	64%	11%
Math 6	40	49	11
Math 9	29	56	15
Math 12	17	70	13
Math Average	30	58	12
Reading 3	37	54	9
Reading 6	30	57	13
Reading 9	31	43	26
Reading 12	38	50	12
Reading Average	34	51	15
Math and Reading Combined	32%	54%	14%

Other Performance Results

Compared to college-bound graduates of 1976 nationally, Colorado seniors in 1975-76 scored significantly better on both mathematics and English tests. This result was reported by both the American College Test (ACT) and the Scholastic Achievement Test "college boards" (SAT). Furthermore, while Colorado ACT and SAT test scores have declined in recent years, along with the national scores, the Colorado score decline has been less rapid than nationally and seems to have stabilized over the past year or two. The colleges and universities in Colorado have been expressing concerns about the writing skills of entering freshmen.

Studies of functional levels of skills (minimal competencies) indicate that Colorado citizens perform above the nation as a whole. The adult performance level study found that nationally about 20% of the adults were functionally incompetent and 47% were functionally proficient. In the Rocky Mountain states (Colorado predominating) 58% of the adults were proficient and only 12% were functionally incompetent.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report that functional literacy levels in the West, including Colorado, rose from 87% in 1971 to 89% in 1974. Writing skills, nationally, may have declined between 1970 and 1974. Nine year-olds were writing somewhat better in 1974 but 13 and 17 year-olds declined in writing skills. Basic mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, spelling and word usage) were handled adequately but incoherence and fragmentation were frequent. Reading scores nationally compared between 1971 and 1975, showed that teen-age scores are about the same as four years ago, while nine year-olds scores have gone up.

NOTE: This paper is a slightly shortened version of the Annual Report for 1975-76 on the Educational Accountability Law by James Hennes, Kathryn DePew, and Joan Harrigan, Colorado Department of Education, February, 1977.

APPENDIX

PROGRESS CHART OF THE DISTRICTS

On the following pages is a chart showing the accountability status of each Colorado school district. The first section indicates whether or not a district has carried out certain accountability activities in compliance with the law. The next section indicates the district's report on how it was doing in the development of the following eight steps in the planning/accountability process:

1) Goal development
2) Needs assessment
3) Development of student objectives
4) Development of staff objectives
5) Designation of priorities or target areas for improvement
6) Program development and implementation
7) Program evaluation
8) Comparing cost and relative value of programs

The final section averages the districts' reports on each of the above eight steps for three key elements asked about in the annual report:

1) The degree of school-community involvement in the accountability steps;
2) The extent to which information on each step has been disseminated; and
3) The degree to which the accountability process has been developed at the building level (as opposed to just at the district level).

A three-step indicator of progress is used in these last two sections of the chart, showing low, medium or high progress in each column

PROCESS REPORT ON THE MOVEMENTS OF DISTRICTS IN ACCOUNTABILITY

District	Location	Compliance with Law									Design and Use of Planning/Accountability Process										
											Reported Extent of Development In Each Step of Process								Average Reported Score Across All 8 Steps		
		Has Committee	Reported to the Board	Charge from Board	Recommendation to Board	Committee Has Priorities	Bldg. Level Committees	Goals	Info. on Costs	Reported to Public	Goals	Needs Assessment	Student Objectives	Staff Objectives	Priorities	Program Development	Program Evaluation	Comparing Costs	Degree of Involvement	Extent of Reporting	Use of Bldg. Level
Adams #1	Mapleton	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	*	●	●	●	*	*	●	●
Adams #12	North Glenn	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	*	*	●	●	●	*	●	●	*
Adams #14	Commerce City	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	•	*	●	*	•	•	•	*	•
Adams #27J	Brighton	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	*	*	●	*	*	*	•	*	*	*
Adams #29J	Bennett	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	*	●	•	*	●	*	*	*	*	*
Adams #31J	Strasburg	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	•	*	●	*	●	*	*	*
Adams #50	Westminster	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	*	*	*	*	•	*	•	•	*	•	•
Alamosa #RE-11J	Alamosa	●	●		●	●	●	●			●	*	•	•	•	*	•	•	•	•	•
Alamosa #RE-22J	Sangre de Cristo (Mosca)	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	*	*	*	*		*	●	●	●	●	*
Arapahoe #1	Englewood	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	*	*	●	*	•	*	*	*
Arapahoe #2	Sheridan	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Arapahoe #5	Cherry Creek	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	*	•	*	●	*	*	•	*	*	*
Arapahoe #6	Littleton	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	*	●	●	●	•	*	*	*
Arapahoe #26J	Deer Trail	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	•	•	•	•	•	•		
Arapahoe #28J	Aurora	●	●	●	●	●		●			●	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	•
Arapahoe #32J	Byers	●	●	●	●	●			●		*										
Archuleta #50Jt	Pagosa Springs	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	*	*	*	*
Baca #RE-1	Walsh	●	●		●	●	●	●		●	*	*	*	•	*	*	•	•	•	•	*
Baca #RE-3	Pritchett	●				●	●	●			●	●	•	•	•	•	•	•			
Baca #RE-4	Springfield	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	*	•	*	●	*	•	*	*	●
Baca #RE-5	Vilas	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	*	*	•	•	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Baca #RE-6	Campo	●	●	●	●		●	●			●	●	*	*	•	●	*	*	•	•	•
Bent #RE-1	Las Animas	●	●		●	●	●	●			●	●	*	•	*	*	•	•	•	•	•
Bent #RE-2	McClave							●													
Boulder #RE-1J	Longmont	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	*	●	*	*	•	*	*	*
Boulder #RE-2J	Boulder Valley	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	*	●	*	*	*	*	*	•	*	*	*
Chaffee #R-31	Buena Vista	●	●					●	●	●	●	●	*	●	●	*	●	*	*	*	*
Chaffee #R-32J	Salida	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●	●	●	•	*	•	•	•	•	•	•
Cheyenne #R-1	Kit Carson	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			*	•	●	•	•	*	✓	•	•	•	*
Cheyenne #R-2	Cheyenne Wells	●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●	●	*	•	•	•	•	•	*	•	*
Cheyenne #3	Arapahoe	●	●	●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	*	*	*	*	*	*

• = Low * = Medium ● = High

(Note--This is an example table. Actual table continues for 181 school districts.)